



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of an **INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION** will be held in virtually on **TUESDAY 20 OCTOBER 2020 AT 9.30 AM**

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Published on 12 October 2020

This meeting may be filmed for inclusion on the Council's website.

Note: The Council has made arrangements under the Coronavirus Act 2020 to hold this meeting virtually via Microsoft Teams. The meeting can be watched live using the following link: <https://youtu.be/bclljjMKn00>

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WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Our Vision

A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business

Enriching Lives

- Champion outstanding education and enable our children and young people to achieve their full potential, regardless of their background.
- Support our residents to lead happy, healthy lives and provide access to good leisure facilities to complement an active lifestyle.
- Engage and involve our communities through arts and culture and create a sense of identity which people feel part of.
- Support growth in our local economy and help to build business.

Safe, Strong, Communities

- Protect and safeguard our children, young and vulnerable people.
- Offer quality care and support, at the right time, to prevent the need for long term care.
- Nurture communities and help them to thrive.
- Ensure our borough and communities remain safe for all.

A Clean and Green Borough

- Do all we can to become carbon neutral and sustainable for the future.
- Protect our borough, keep it clean and enhance our green areas.
- Reduce our waste, improve biodiversity and increase recycling.
- Connect our parks and open spaces with green cycleways.

Right Homes, Right Places

- Offer quality, affordable, sustainable homes fit for the future.
- Build our fair share of housing with the right infrastructure to support and enable our borough to grow.
- Protect our unique places and preserve our natural environment.
- Help with your housing needs and support people to live independently in their own homes.

Keeping the Borough Moving

- Maintain and improve our roads, footpaths and cycleways.
- Tackle traffic congestion, minimise delays and disruptions.
- Enable safe and sustainable travel around the borough with good transport infrastructure.
- Promote healthy alternative travel options and support our partners to offer affordable, accessible public transport with good network links.

Changing the Way We Work for You

- Be relentlessly customer focussed.
- Work with our partners to provide efficient, effective, joined up services which are focussed around you.
- Communicate better with you, owning issues, updating on progress and responding appropriately as well as promoting what is happening in our Borough.
- Drive innovative digital ways of working that will connect our communities, businesses and customers to our services in a way that suits their needs.

For consideration by

John Kaiser, Executive Member for Finance and Housing

Officers Present

Madeleine Shopland, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist

Nicky Thomas, Senior Specialist – Assessments

IMD NO.	WARD	SUBJECT	
IMD 2020/15	None Specific	DISCRETIONARY TEST & TRACE SUPPORT PAYMENTS SCHEME	5 - 18

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Agenda Item IMD15

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

REFERENCE IMD: 2020/15

TITLE	Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments Scheme
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	Executive Member for Finance and Housing - John Kaiser
DATE, MEETING ROOM and TIME	20 October 2020 Virtually at 9:30am
WARD	None specific
DIRECTOR / KEY OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers

PURPOSE OF REPORT (Inc Strategic Outcomes)

Wokingham Borough Council (the Council) have been provided funds by Department of Health and Social Care to adopt a Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments scheme for the finite period of 28th September 2020 to 31st January 2021, which compliments the Governments national Test & Trace Support Payments scheme.

These payments are designed to ensure people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and their close contacts, will self-isolate for the required period even though they may lose wages. They are also designed to encourage individuals who are eligible for this payment to get tested if they have symptoms. This is important to help stop the transmission of COVID-19 and avoid further economic and societal restrictions.

This scheme will be known as the Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments scheme and will apply from the date of adoption, until changed.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive Member for Housing and Finance approve the policy as contained within Annex A to the report. This policy may need to be changed and a further "Urgent Item" may be required at a later date. Currently this scheme will operate from 28th September 2020 to 31st January 2021

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Council will consider making a Discretionary Test & Support Payment to applicants who meet the qualifying criteria, as specified in this policy, providing sufficient funding for this purpose is available at the time of the Council's decision. All applications will be considered on their individual merits.

The features of the Council's Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments scheme are that an applicant:

- has been told to stay at home and self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, either because they have tested positive for coronavirus or have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive; and
- is employed or self-employed; and
- is unable to work from home and will lose income as a result; and
- **is not** currently receiving Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit; and
- is on a low income and will face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work while they are self-isolating.
- must not hold capital in excess £5,000. If money is held in a joint account, a percentage of the value will be assumed to belong to each party.
- be able to satisfy that they will face hardship if they have to self-isolate because they cannot work

The purpose of this policy is to detail the Council's high level objectives in respect of Discretionary Test & Support Payments and detail how the Council will operate the scheme, including the factors that will be taken into account when considering if an award can be made. Each case will be treated strictly on its merits and all applicants will be treated equally and fairly when the scheme is administered.

to the policy will seek to:

- ease severe financial pressure on individuals in certain situations;
- give financial help to those in genuine need;
- help those without the necessary means.
- To encourage residents to self-isolate where appropriate and get tested without financial risk
- sign-posting to the best organisation to assist with needs

Background

On 20th September, the Government announced that it would provide Local Authorities with additional funding to administer the Test & Trace Support Payment (T&TSP) scheme to support people on low incomes who are unable to work from home if they are told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace and will lose income as a result.

The first guidance from Department of Health & Social Care was received 28th September 2020 (dated 25th September) and has had several updates since. In the guidance received 1st October 2020 (dated 30th September) details of discretion scheme started to emerge and funding for this was confirmed on 2nd October 2020 (received 5th October). Due to these delays the statutory 28 days' notice for an IEMD has not been able to be met, therefore we are requesting this as an urgent item.

From 28 September 2020, individuals who qualify are entitled to a Test and Trace Support Payment or Discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment of £500.

These payments are designed to help ensure people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and their close contacts to self-isolate for the required period to stop the onward spread of the virus. They are also designed to encourage individuals who are eligible for this payment to get tested if they have symptoms. This is important to help stop the transmission of COVID-19 and avoid further economic and societal restrictions.

The scheme started on 28 September 2020, and local authorities were required to have arrangements in place to administer payments by 12 October 2020. The scheme will last until 31 January 2021.

There are two schemes: the main scheme and the discretionary scheme. This policy concentrates on the discretionary scheme

These payments are aimed at individuals who meet **all** of the following criteria as set by Government and must apply to **all** applications, with the **exception** of qualifying benefits for the discretionary scheme:

- Have been told to stay at homes and self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, either because they have tested positive for coronavirus or have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive
- Are employed or self-employed
- Are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result
- Are currently receiving Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit (*not required for discretionary scheme*)

The Government guidance sets out what local authorities in England need to do to enable people in their area to claim the Test and Trace Support Payment, including discretionary payments.

The Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments are intended to support residents that have received a Test & Trace COVID-19 CTAS number who meet all of the criteria in the policy with the exception of a qualifying benefit (Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit)

The delivery of the discretionary payment is purely at the Council's discretion. The value of the payment to be made to a successful applicant will be £500 whether main or discretionary. The decision as to whether a Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments will be made will be administered by the Assessments Team.

The Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payment scheme will be advertised directly on our website and the applicant can apply on-line or via.

To be considered for a Discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment the applicant must:

- have been told to stay at home and self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, either because they have tested positive for coronavirus or have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive;
- be employed or self-employed; and
- be unable to work from home and will lose income as a result.
- **not** currently receiving Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit; and
- be on low incomes and will face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work while they are self-isolating.
- Must not hold capital in excess £5,000. If money is held in a joint account, a percentage of the value will be assumed to belong to each party.
- Be able to satisfy that they will face hardship if they have to self-isolate because they cannot work

Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments are not subject to any formal statutory appeals process and therefore there are no appeal rights.

This policy has been designed with consideration of The Human Rights Act 1998 and The Equality Act 2010

Business Case (including Analysis of Issues)

The Test & Trace Support Payment schemes (main & discretionary) are a Government initiative to assist with controlling COVID-19 infection rates. These payments are designed to encourage individuals who are eligible for this payment to get tested if they have symptoms. This is important to help stop the transmission of COVID-19 and avoid further economic and societal restrictions.

Each authority has been given an allocation to spend on the discretionary scheme and they must decide the criteria for themselves. No further funds will be added from the local authority.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	The council has been provided funds by DHSC to run its scheme of £27,579.30 for the period 28 th September 2020 to 31 st January 2021	Yes. No further awards will be made if funding is exhausted in year	
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Not applicable		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Not applicable		

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None

Cross-Council Implications
N/A

Public Sector Equality Duty
An equalities assessment has been considered but due to timings will be finalised within the next week.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
Director – Corporate Services	Director and Assistant Director have reviewed policy and had the opportunity to comment on.
Monitoring Officer	Notified and nothing specific to add
Leader of the Council	Notified and nothing specific to add

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
N/A

List of Background Papers
Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments Policy

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WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

DISCRETIONARY TEST & TRACE SUPPORT PAYMENTS POLICY 28th Sept 2020 – 31st Jan 2021 COVID 19

Version Control

Version	Date	Author	Comments
1	01.10.20	Nicky Thomas	First draft
2	06.10.20	Nicky Thomas	First amendments with Clare Fell
3	08.10.20	Nicky Thomas	Agreement and any amendments with Simon Price & John Kaiser
4	12.10.20	Nicky Thomas	Process started on Mod Gov
5	20.10.20	Nicky Thomas	IEMD Urgent Item – Sign-off

1.0 Introduction

National Picture

On 20th September, the Government announced that it would provide Local Authorities with additional funding to administer the Test & Trace Support Payment (T&TSP) scheme to support people on low incomes who are unable to work from home if they are told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace and will lose income as a result.

From 28 September 2020, qualifying individuals are entitled to a Test and Trace Support Payment or Discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment of £500.

These payments are designed to help ensure people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and their close contacts, to self-isolate for the required period to stop the onward spread of the virus. They are also designed to encourage individuals who are eligible for this payment to get tested if they have symptoms. This is important to help stop the transmission of COVID-19 and avoid further economic and societal restrictions.

The scheme started on 28 September 2020, and local authorities were required to have arrangements in place to administer payments by 12 October 2020. The scheme will last until 31 January 2021.

There are two schemes: the main scheme and the discretionary scheme. This policy concentrates on the discretionary scheme which is to be designed by each Local Authority but still meets the aims of the main scheme.

These payments are aimed at individuals who meet **all** of the following criteria as set by Government and must apply to **all** applications, with the **exception** of qualifying benefits for the discretionary scheme:

- Have been told to stay at homes and self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, either because they have tested positive for coronavirus or have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive
- Are employed or self-employed
- Are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result
- Are currently receiving Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit (*not required for discretionary scheme*)

The decision as to whether a Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments will be payable will be made by the Assessments Team.

Local Picture

Wokingham Borough Council will run a scheme during the period required by law from 28th September 2020 to 31st January 2021

The purpose of this policy is to detail the Council's high level objectives in respect of the Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments programme and detail how the Council will operate the scheme, including the factors that will be taken into account when considering if an award can be made. Each case will be treated strictly on whether the claimant meets the necessary criteria as set in the main scheme and this discretionary scheme. All applicants will be treated equally and fairly when the scheme is administered.

2.0 Statement of Objectives

Supporting financially vulnerable residents of Wokingham Borough forms part of the duties and responsibilities of various council (and partner) teams. It recognises that in addition to the wide spectrum of support that is available to its residents, the Council needs to be flexible in its approach in order to mitigate unforeseen circumstances that place additional pressures on residents that could result in financial hardship.

The Discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment will be a one-off payment of £500 to provide additional funds to those having to self-isolate, have seen a reduction in income which will leave them financially vulnerable and they do not qualify for the main scheme. We will seek to:

- ease severe financial pressure on individuals in certain situations;
- give financial help to those in genuine need;
- help those without the necessary means.
- To encourage residents to self-isolate where appropriate and get tested without financial risk
- sign-posting to the best organisation to assist with needs

3.0 Policy

3.1 Test & Trace Support Payments - Discretionary Scheme

The Government guidance sets out what local authorities in England need to do to enable people in their area to claim the Test and Trace Support Payment, including discretionary payments.

The Council has reviewed the guidance and has developed the criteria below based on this guidance.

The Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments are intended to support residents that have received a Test & Trace COVID-19 CTAS number who meet all of the criteria with the exception of a qualifying benefit (Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based

Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit)

The delivery of the discretionary payment is purely at the Council's discretion. The scheme set out in the following paper shall be known as The Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments and will apply from 28th September 2020 until changed 31st January 2021.

The value of the payment to be made to a successful applicant will be £500 whether main or discretionary.

All applications for the discretionary scheme will be considered on their individual merits.

3.2 Applying for a Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payment

The discretionary payment will be advertised directly on our website and the applicant can apply on-line or via telephone for those who are unable to apply on-line. They will be asked to provide their supporting evidence as this will be required to assist the decision making process. This evidence can be uploaded on-line when making the application or can be emailed in to a dedicated in-box

All outcomes will be notified in writing.

3.3 Eligibility Criteria

Only applicants who are told to self-isolate from 28th September 2020 will be eligible to claim. The scheme operates until 31st January 2021

It is a one-off payment but applicants can make more than one request if they are told to self-isolate more than once.

To be considered for a Discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment the applicant must:

- have been told to stay at home and self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, either because they have tested positive for coronavirus or have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive;
- be employed or self-employed; and
- be unable to work from home and will lose income as a result.
- **not** currently receiving Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit and/or Pension Credit; and
- be on low incomes and will face financial hardship as a result of not being able to work while they are self-isolating.
- Must not hold capital in excess of £5,000. If money is held in a joint account, a percentage of the value will be assumed to belong to each party.

- Be able to satisfy that they will face hardship if they have to self-isolate because they cannot work

3.4 Awarding a Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payment

In deciding whether to make a Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payment we will have regard to the applicants circumstances. In order to do this each applicant must supply supporting evidence to support their request for the payment. This will include, but is not limited to:

- Bank/Building Society statements for the last 2 months for all accounts held by the applicant in sole or joint name
- Proof of any other capital held for example bonds, ISA's, stocks and shares, savings accounts
- Proof they have an earned income and expect to face a reduction in income due to self-isolating

The Council has funding from the government to support 55 applications for Discretionary Test and Trace Support Payment, this is a finite budget.

Once this funding has been exhausted no further payments will be made.

3.5 Payment of a Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payment

Local authorities should pay eligible individuals within three working days of receiving their application. Payments should be made up front, as a single payment, to the bank account matching the bank statement they have provided, via the most appropriate payment mechanism.

3.7 Notification

The Council will notify the applicant of the outcome in writing no later than three days after the application is received.

Notification will be sent if awarded or if not awarded

3.8 Right to Appeal

Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments are not subject to any formal statutory appeals process and therefore there are no appeal rights.

4.9 Overpayments

If the Council becomes aware that the information contained in an application for a Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments was incorrect or that relevant information was not declared, either intentionally or otherwise, the Council will seek to recover the payment made as a result.

4.10 Fraud

The Council is committed to the fight against fraud in all its forms. Any applicant who tries to fraudulently claim a Discretionary Test & Trace Support payment might have committed an offence under the Fraud Act 2006.

If the Council suspects that fraud may have occurred, the matter will be investigated as appropriate and this could lead to criminal proceedings.

3.11 Publicity

In addition to details being contained on the Council's website, the scheme will be advertised via social media and support from the Communities Hubs.

4. Monitoring

The Assessments Team and the Senior Finance Specialist will monitor the amount and types of award made. This monitoring information will be made available for management and Members at any time. In addition it will be used to make the necessary government returns to the Department of Health and Social Care and the NHS, with whom data can be shared within appropriate legislation and guidance.

5. Financial Implications

The Council will be given the following grant based on its share of the funding made available by Government:

Total Government funding:

- **£25 million** for programme costs (costs of payments to applicants), excluding discretionary payments.
- **£10 million** for administration costs.
- **£15 million** for discretionary payments.

The Council's allocation:

- **£45,500.00** programme costs which equates to initially 91 payments
- **£26,770.40** administration costs
- **£27, 579.30** discretionary payments which equates to 55 discretionary payments

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